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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON IDP ASSISTANCE IN BAJAUR AGENCY

REF: PESHAWAR 43

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Despite recent military operations in Bajaur that may have "secured" roads in parts of the agency (reftel), the majority of internally displaced persons (IDPs) have not yet begun to return because they see military operations continuing. USAID is currently providing USD 1.8 million in assistance in Bajaur and is helping the GOP develop a strategy for return. USAID is ready to provide scaled-up assistance as IDPs begin to return, but Peshawar and other field sources say that IDPs will not return without a period of at least several weeks of calm, as well as assurances from the GOP that the area is safe. End Summary.

CONDITIONS IN BAJAUR

¶2. (SBU) The fighting in Bajaur severely damaged the infrastructure in much of the Agency. Some initial estimates indicate that at least 2000 houses were destroyed, but some sources on the ground believe the number is far higher. No formal assessment has yet been done. Livelihoods were devastated. Crops were destroyed, and IDPs have been unable to cultivate in much of the agency. Many were forced to sell off their livestock at prices far below market value when they fled, and small businesses have been disrupted. If IDPs are unable to return in time for the coming wheat harvesting and maize planting seasons, their livelihoods will further deteriorate.

¶3. (SBU) Sources report that the majority of damage is in Upper Khar, particularly in Loyesam (where the fighting began), Inayat Kalay (the business center and gateway to Mahmund tehsil) and Tahngkhata (considered a center of Taliban activity). Mahmund and Nawagai tehsils are also severely affected. In Mahmund and Nawagai, an estimated 70-80 percent of the population fled and is still displaced; the other 20-30 percent is mainly individual men who stayed as the representatives of their families to keep an eye on property and livelihoods. Sources estimate that in 50 percent of Khar tehsil and in all of Mahmund and Nawagai, people are unable to cultivate their lands due to an ongoing curfew and ban on transportation of goods, still reportedly in effect as of March 6.

IDPS NOT YET RETURNING TO BAJAUR

¶4. (SBU) According to UN figures, as of 6 March, a total of 139,745 registered IDPs were still displaced outside of camps and a further 62,497 inside camps.

¶ 15. (SBU) In the wake of the GOP announcements of the ceasefire in Bajaur, small numbers of IDPs have been returning to particular areas deemed "cleared" by the Political Administration, but most IDPs seem to be taking a wait-and-see approach. Small numbers are conducting temporary scouting visits to check on the status of their houses or crops.

¶ 16. (SBU) Local aid workers believe that security is the main reason that IDPs have not begun returning en masse. At a grand jirga on March 2 in Khar, tribal elders asked the GOP to address security as well as providing for reconstruction needs. Local sources theorize that IDPs are waiting for a "clear message" by the political administration that it is safe to return, and that IDPs are meanwhile waiting to see how the current jirga unfolds. (Note: Post is currently exploring ideas for an information campaign in the camps as well as other confidence-building initiatives to bring government officials to the displaced communities, and/or community representatives to Bajaur to review conditions in the agency.)

¶ 17. (SBU) Meanwhile, Bajauris have already begun seeking compensation from the GOP for losses to their real and personal property. According to one observer, at least a thousand requests for compensation have been submitted to the political administration.

CURRENT USG ASSISTANCE IN BAJAUR

¶ 18. (SBU) USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) currently has a total of 23 relief and reconstruction activities underway in Bajaur Agency, for a total value of USD 1,832,539 (details follow). These activities are carried out under the auspices of the

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Government of Pakistan. (Note: This does not include the USG relief provided to IDPs outside of Bajaur.)

-- Assistance to IDPs: OTI delivered 1,500 non-food item relief kits consisting of plastic mats, jerry cans, gas stoves, cloth, blankets, and cooking utensils (valued at USD 250,000) to the Political Administration for distribution. Of those, the GOP has only distributed 824.

-- Short-term employment: Through OTI, the political administration has so far employed 6,425 workers for debris cleanup and similar activities at 168 different sites throughout Bajaur, creating 29,172 employment days, and disbursing USD 122,000.

-- Seed Distribution in Khar, Arang, and Barang: OTI provided 478 farming families wheat seed and technical training, and is currently providing 170,000 fruit and plant seedlings to 10,000 families.

-- Repair of Damaged Infrastructure: In Khar, OTI is rehabilitating four schools and four roads in Khar, and is rehabilitating 8 surface water tanks and providing 15 transformers to repair the electrical grid. Similar activities are underway in the relatively secure Utman Khel tehsil (Arang and Barang).

PLANNED ASSISTANCE

¶ 19. (SBU) To assist returning IDPs, USAID's Livelihoods program has a total of 3,000 tent kits (worth USD 439,170) and 1,800 reconstruction kits (worth USD 108,936) warehoused at Peshawar while 2,000 tent kits (worth USD 292,780) and 620 restoration kits (worth USD 375,224) are stored at a warehouse inside the Political Agent's compound at Khar. These items are ready to be distributed as soon as the political administration approves it. In addition, the political administration retains 676 non-food item kits from OTI.

¶ 10. (SBU) USAID has set aside approximately USD 9 million for short-term reconstruction needs. USAID Livelihoods is planning to devote USD 7.73 million to projects in the following sectors: road construction (22 km main Barang Road from Barang Valley, Bajaur to Kot, Malakand (worth USD 3,000,000), 3 km access road linking Gossam Bridge (Lower Dir) to Kharkay (worth USD 300,000), 4 km access road linking Gossam Bridge (Lower Dir) to Kulalai (worth USD 400,000),

two Bridges between Kulalai (Bajaur Agency) connecting Gossam/ Munda (Lower Dir) (worth USD 3,000,000), an Additional Block at the Political Agent's compound at Khar (worth USD 77,300), and short-term employment generation through various interventions under Cash for Work and Debris Clearance (worth USD 650,000). In addition, OTI plans to increase and expand its projects to include confidence-building activities. USAID/Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance is closely monitoring the situation and will provide additional humanitarian assistance depending on the needs.

¶11. (SBU) These activities are being planned in conjunction with the Civil-Military Coordination Committee (CMCC). The CMCC, organized by the Consulate to improve Pakistani interagency and donor coordination, brings together officials from the FATA Secretariat, 11th Corps, and Frontier Corps to review development priorities in FATA with USAID, State, and U.S. military representatives. The USG is working with the Government of Pakistan to develop a strategy for IDP returns using the CMCC structure.

¶12. (SBU) Communications will need to be a vital part of the IDP returns process and the reconstruction efforts. Helping IDPs understand what assistance will be available may help influence their return, but current information indicates they will not return in large numbers until they have greater assurances of security.

PATTERSON